



Al-Risala 1993

July-August

Speaking with sincerity

The Prophet Muhammad is reported by Abu Hurayrah as having said: "One who sits in an excessively noisy meeting, then before leaving the meeting says: "Glory be to You, O Lord, and praise. I bear witness that there is no God save You. I seek Your forgiveness, and turn to You in repentance," will have all that passed in that meeting forgiven him by God" (Tirmidhi, Nasai).

But it is not just a mechanical recital of these words which will earn us God's forgiveness. That will be forthcoming only if we utter them in all earnestness and with a keen awareness of their meaning. The sentiments they convey must be endorsed by both heart and intellect. The Prophet in this instance was describing the action of a person who stands in fear of God. We have to imagine such an individual so forgetting himself in the course of a conversation that he raises his voice in anger, quarrelling quite unnecessarily with his companions. But before matters have gone too far, his conscience comes into play and he realises that he has spoken out of turn. Ashamed of having gone to extremes and offended others, he turns to God for forgiveness.

One example of the form his supplication takes is that given in the saying of the Prophet quoted above. But, in order to be effective, the words of the prayer must be uttered in their true spirit; they must be spoken with full consciousness of their inherent meaning.

One should be moved in one's heart of hearts to offer this prayer. No mindless parrotting of the words will ever earn the forgiveness of God.

The task to be performed

“Lower your gaze,” he would tell them. “Go out with thoughts of God in your heart, His remembrance on your lips.” Mentioned here: a serious outlook, a sense of responsibility, and your journey will be easy if you advance in unison.

Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, founder of Tablighi Jamaat – a world-wide Muslim reform movement with its centre in New Delhi – used to issue this instruction to preaching groups that he sent out. “Lower your gaze,” he would tell them. “Go out with thoughts of God in your heart, and His remembrance on your lips. That is to say, a serious outlook, a sense of responsibility, and your journey will be easy if you advance in unison. Any group which adopts these characteristics is bound to be successful.

How important these three things are. It would be true to say that it is this awareness, this spirit, which really needs to be aroused in people. This is the real task to be performed. Success in both this world and the next is dependent on its accomplishment.

A nation, a social system, does not have an independent, separate existence; it exists only by virtue of the individuals that form it. A collection of individuals make up a nation, while their social system comes from the way they, as individuals, act. If reform is to come in a nation or society, it has to be the individuals who make up that nation who undergo reform.

Keeping this fact in mind, one can see that any reform programme has to be targeted at individuals for it to be worthwhile. If society is made the target, one may seek social reform, but the result will be social chaos. What one is seeking on a mass level will only come about when it has been achieved on an individual level. Slogans raised in the name of social reform are meaningless without the initial reform of individuals. Those who raise such slogans are either power-seeking, or plain foolish; there is no other way their action can be interpreted.

Each and every individual has to be imbued with deep faith so that his gaze lowers in humility; awareness that he is answerable to God for his actions becomes embedded in his heart; such is his consciousness of God’s greatness that he forever makes mention of the Lord; having no thoughts of self, he is able to become one with others. If individuals acquire these qualities, the reforms that people seek in society will automatically come about.

Paying back what one owes others

A few days before he died, the Prophet delivered an unusually long speech. Finally he said: "I want to, be able to present a clean sheet of my life to God. If I owe anybody anything, which I forgot to repay, or have physically' or mentally harmed anyone without my knowledge, then I request him to accept compensation or forgive me." The Prophet finished speaking and waited a while,' but no one spoke up. He then prayed the early afternoon prayer, after which he repeated his request. A man rose and said: "Prophet of God, you owe me five dirhams." The Prophet gave instructions for, him to be repaid, there and then.

Here to be tested

While in an examination hall, a student has several objects at his disposal. Over his head, there is the roof of the examination hall itself. Then he has a table on which to write, a chair on which to sit, ink and paper for his answers, and attendants to see to his requirements. He sits in his place and uses these facilities freely, without restriction.

If he did not have an examination hall in which to sit, the examinee would be exposed to heat and cold. If there were no desk and chair at his disposal, he would not be able to sit comfortably. Without pen, paper and ink, there would be no question of his writing answers.

But a student only has these things because of the examination he is taking. They are his only so long as his examination lasts. As soon as the exam is over, all its accessories will be taken away from him. Judging from the freedom with which he used them within the confines of the examination hall, one would have thought they were his; now it will become clear that they were only lent to him for a short while.

It is much the same with man in this world. Here, man has many objects at his disposal. He considers himself free to use them as he pleases, to live the life of his own choice. But the truth of the matter is that whatever man has in this world is his because of the test he is undergoing. God has put man in this world so that he may be tested. For the purpose of this test, man is provided with a number of essential accessories, things which will only remain in his possession for the duration of his test. As soon as man's trial has run its course, everything will be taken away from him. One who seems to own everything will be left with nothing. Man will stand alone, like a traveller stranded in the middle of a desert, or a man left to drift in the voids of space.

And only one thing – the invisible wall of death – lies between man and the end of his test on earth.

Working on the individual

Solidarity has to be achieved at an individual level before it can come about in society. For it is a law of nature, and human society, that for a tree to bear good fruit, it is the seed, not the fruit itself, that has to be improved.

A man was riding his bicycle one day when all of a sudden his brake jammed. Luckily there was a cycle repair-shop nearby, so he took his bike there to have it fixed. Thinking that the mechanic would fix the brake at the point where it was jammed, the cyclist was surprised to see him tap away with a small hammer at a completely different place. Before he was able to express his surprise, however, the mechanic handed the bike over. "That's fixed it. You can take it away now," he said. And off the cyclist rode, with his bike once again running smoothly.

What was true of this bicycle is true also of human society. When there is something wrong with society, people usually jump to the conclusion that where the malaise lies, there also lies the cure. But this is not the case. Usually the root of the malaise lies in a different place, far away from the symptoms. Until the cause is removed, the malaise itself will not go away.

For instance, there might be a lack of solidarity in society, or one's people may be the victims of oppression. Maybe society is beset with an atmosphere of intrigue, with the result that its voice carries no weight in the world. Detecting these symptoms, one who determines to right the ills of society might well think that the cure lies in calling meetings and conventions in order to bring people together, feeding them emotional speeches and passing high sounding resolutions, and so on.

But this is not the way to cure the actual ills of society. To do so, one has to work on the cause, not the symptoms, for usually one will find that while a problem seems to be afflicting one part of society, the cure lies elsewhere. If there is a lack of solidarity, for instance, the reason for this is the failure of individuals to stand together. It is the individual, then, who has to be worked on. Solidarity has to be achieved at an individual level before it can come about in society. For it is a law of nature, and human society, that for a tree to bear good fruit, it is the seed, not the fruit itself, that has to be improved.

Knowledge that harms

The Prophet Muhammad said: "Even more than the Great Deceiver, (Dajjal) it is from others that I fear for you." The Prophet was asked. Who they were and he replied: "Wicked men of learning." On another occasion, the Prophet said: "He who increases his learning, but does not increase in guidance, will only become further away from God." Likewise, the Prophet said: "The one who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection is a man of learning whom God has not benefited through his learning." "On the night when I was taken to the heavens," recalled the Prophet Muhammad, "I passed some people whose lips were being cut with scissors of fire. 'Who are you?' I asked, and they replied: 'We are the ones who used to command good, but we ourselves did not practice it; and we used to forbid evil, while ourselves practicing it.'" This prayer was often on the Prophet's lips: 'Lord, I seek refuge with You from knowledge which does not benefit, from a heart which has no fear; from actions which are not lifted up to heaven and from a prayer which is not heard.'

Mark of greatness

After the Prophet emigrated to Medina, his enemies did not leave him in peace. Even in Medina, they posed a threat to him, and the Muslims were forced to fight back. Battle after battle ensued, none of which decisively turned the scales towards either the Muslims or their enemies. Finally the Prophet made peace with his opponents, unilaterally accepting all the conditions they laid down. This peace treaty, signed at Hudaibiyyah in the year 6AH, opened the way to final victory for the Muslims. In Abu Bakr's words: "There was no greater triumph in Islam than the triumph of Hudaibiyyah."

But it was no easy task for the Muslims, accepting the terms of this treaty, for it was made entirely according to the dictates of the enemy. With the sole exception of Abu Bakr, all the Companions opposed it. In later life, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab recalled the episode in these words: "Were the Prophet to have given someone authority over me, and he were to sign the peace that the Prophet signed, and make the concessions that he made, then I would not listen and I would not obey. One of the concessions the Prophet made to them was that anyone who joined the Muslims from the idolators would be returned, while the idolators would not have to return anyone who joined them from the Muslim camp" (*Kanz-al-Umma*).

In the whole of human history, no group has achieved success on the scale of the early Muslims. But there was a price that had to be paid for this huge success. On the way to their success, the Muslims had to bear the unbearable, not insisting on the return of something of theirs which went to their enemy, while at the same time agreeing to return to their enemy anything of his that was in the Muslims' possession.

“Sadullah, I need a man”

It is only when the individual is willing to step down in favour of higher principles that society as a whole can benefit. The sacrifice of the individual is the price to be paid for the glory of the nation. No nation can ever hold up its head, far less take pride of place amongst the nations of the world, if the individuals of which it is comprised think of nothing but personal gain and self-glorification.

During his last days, there was an occasion once when Aurangzeb (1618-1707), the last great Mughal emperor, shed tears as, raising his hands in supplications, he said his prayers. He went on praying silently like this for a long time with his vizier (minister) standing by his side. When his prayers finally came to an end, the Vizier, Sadullah, addressed him thus:

“Your Majesty, the flag of your empire can be seen flying everywhere, right from Kashmir to Deccan. Is there still some wish in your heart which has been left unfulfilled and because of which you are so grief-stricken?” Aurangzeb remained silent for a while, then, his voice charged with emotion, he replied:

Sadullah marde khwahum.

(Sadullah, I need a man.)

What kind of man was this that the emperor was so desperate to find? What was this great problem which was so tormenting him? It was simply his own awareness that his successors, who were to inherit the great Mughal empire, were all thoroughly self-centered people, who were incapable of foresight, objectivity or self-sacrifice, and who thought only of short-term gains. He sensed that they would fight amongst themselves for personal power and glory, thus fragmenting and destroying his vast, hard-won Mughal empire.

After having reigned for half a century, he passed away on the 20th of February, 1707, survived by three sons, Muazzam, Azam and Kam Bakhsh, who were governors respectively of Kabul, Gujarat and Bijapur. Aurangzeb had felt that the only practical solution to the problems of succession was to leave a will dividing the empire into three parts in order that each son might live in the separate sphere assigned to him, and would not, therefore, clash with either of his brothers.

But this idea met with no success. Soon after the death of Aurangzeb, all three princes claimed the throne of Delhi. They then proceeded to do battle' with one another for two years until Prince Kam Bakhsh and Prince Azam had been killed, whereupon Prince Muazzam ascended the throne of Delhi in 1708, choosing for himself the title of “Shah-e-Alam” (King of the world).

Shah-e-Alam, however, did not realise at that time 'that he did not have long to live. Hardly four years had elapsed after his capture of the throne when he expired in 1712, leaving behind him four sons, Jahandar Shah, Azimushshan, Jahan Shah and Rafi-ush-Shan. Without exception, they took after their father, losing no time in entering into conflict with one another, each one, of course, aspiring to the throne, irrespective of the cost. Ultimately, in the ensuing battle, three of them were killed. Jahandar Shah, the victor, then seized the throne. But his rule, too, was short-lived – barely one year – for Farrukh Ser, the son of his murdered brother had set himself to avenging his father's death. His plot was successful and Jahandar Shah was dethroned and hanged in the Red Fort in 1713.

Although, having killed his uncle, Farrukh Ser came to possess the throne of Delhi; he retained it for barely six years, for his enemies finally succeeded in overpowering him. One day in the year 1719, he was dragged down from his throne, beaten cruelly, then thrown into prison where he was killed by strangulation. After this murder, Prince Rafiud Darajat ascended the throne of Delhi. But his reign was even shorter than that of his immediate predecessors, having come to the throne on the 28th of February 1719 only to be ousted on the 4th of June 1719. A few-days later, he died of tuberculosis.

The domestic war between the Mughal princes considerably weakened the central government of Delhi, which lost its hold on the provinces, thus sparking off a tendency among the different provinces to seek their independence. To quote from a standard history of India:

"On the decline of the central authority at Delhi, the inevitable centrifugal tendency was manifest in different parts of the Empire and the provincial viceroys made themselves independent of the titular Delhi emperor" (*An Advanced 'History of India*, 1978, p. 529).

Events had borne out Aurangzeb's worst misgivings. The Deccan province became independent in 1724 under Qamruddin Khan (Nizamul-Mulk). Awadh province established independent rule in 1754 under Saadat Khan. Bengal saw its independence in 1739 under Sarfaraz Khan, who was known as the Nawab of Bengal. Similarly the Rajput States, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, etc., abandoned their allegiance to Delhi and assumed independent status. The vast empire of Aurangzeb had thus torn into pieces.

After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire continued apparently to exist for a further 150 years, but this was a period frequently marred by internecine bloodshed. There was a constant struggle for personal power going on between the Mughal princes, nobles and ministers and the result was that the Mughal empire was being weakened and diminished day by day. The English were quick to exploit this situation, and made greater and greater inroads into the country until a stage was reached when they succeeded wresting control of the entire country. The Mughal emperor at the Red Fort was emperor only in name, and almost all power was vested in the hands of the English. Two of the phrases coined at that time aptly sum up the state of affairs:

"The government of Shah Alam stretches from Delhi to Palam." and "Bahadur Shah sits on the throne, but the company gives the orders!" (i.e. the East India Company).

Finally, in the wake of the 1857 revolution this mere figurehead was removed from the scene for ever.

The story of the Mughal empire is the story of all Muslims, the greatest reasons for their downfall in later times being the same as they were in Mughal times – the pursuit of personal glory, the resulting internecine warfare and the sacrifice of higher and greater things. Personal objectives may have been temporarily achieved, but no great social order has resulted.

It is only when the individual is willing to step down in favour of higher principles that society as a whole can benefit. The sacrifice of the individual is the price to be paid for the glory of the nation. No nation can ever hold up its head, far less take pride of place amongst the nations of the world, if the individuals of which it is comprised think of nothing but personal gain and self-glorification. This has never been so, and nowhere is this evident in the world of today.

Pride comes before a fall

'Evil can have no beginning but from pride nor any end but from humility.'

'Evil can have no beginning but from pride nor any end but from humility.' When the English author William Law (1686-1761) wrote these words, he placed them in an ethical context. But they could well be interpreted in a spiritual sense, for the most sinful attitude that man can adopt before God is one of pride. Other sins may be forgivable, but for pride there is no forgiveness.

Pride, whether overt or covert, is at the root of all the wrongs and injustice perpetrated by man. It is pride which prevents the wrongdoer from acknowledging his guilt: to do so, would detract from his personal status. He forgets that in denying, or ignoring what is true, he places himself *above* truth. It is folly to do so, for truth rides high, far and above everything and everyone else in this world. There is no mortal creature who can take precedence over it.

It is only the individual who lives out his life in consonance with the true nature of things who will receive God's blessings. To attain to this state of blessedness, he must realize that truth transcends all, and that he should bow before it. But those who are puffed up with a sense of their own importance are seldom capable of doing so. Instead of bowing before truth, they want truth to bow before them. Instead of living in harmony with reality, they demand that reality should harmonise with their wishes. This is as unrealistic as it is egoistic, for things can never happen in this way in the world. The perpetually proud man – without his ever realising it – is doomed to moral bankruptcy and can never find favour in the eyes of God.

Potential for preaching the word of God

In September 1985, news appeared in the Arabic weekly *Al-Dawah*, published from Riyadh, that a Dr. Girennier from France had embraced Islam. Here is part of what Dr. Girennier said on his reasons for becoming Muslim:

I looked into all the verses of the Qur'an dealing with the physical and medical sciences which I have studied since youth and with which I am well-acquainted. I found that these verses of the Qur'an tally completely with our modern knowledge. I have accepted Islam because of my conviction that Muhammad came with the plain truth. Born a thousand years ago, he studied in no worldly school and had no human teacher, still, all that he said has proved true. I suggest that every expert in each separate field of the arts and science should do as I have done and compare the relevant verses of the Qur'an with the knowledge at his disposal. If he is intelligent and free of self-motivation, he will surely accept Islam.

Such is the impact the Qur'an has on one who studies it objectively. He instinctively feels that this is the work of One who, as early as the seventh century, knew facts that have only come to light much later, in the twentieth century. This is a unique feature of the Qur'an, proving beyond all doubt that the Qur'an was revealed by God, Who knows all things; it could not be the work of man. This is the living miracle of the Qur'an. When we say that the Qur'an is the Book of God, the miraculous nature of the Qur'an itself backs up our claim, leaving people no choice but to believe. Only those dominated by self-interest will discard the truth after it has been plainly demonstrated to them. (115:6)

Way of the Prophet

"It does not become a Muslim to humiliate himself." When asked how it is possible to humiliate oneself, the Prophet Muhammad replied, 'To expose oneself to a danger over which one has no control.'

A few years back, it happened that a city bus, which was passing a big Islamic Institution in Delhi, accidentally crushed a Muslim student under its wheels and killed him. A number of Muslim students of that Institution immediately congregated at the scene of the accident, but the bus driver had already fled. Out to avenge this tragic death, the students set fire to the offending bus, and, not content with this, they began to stone other buses on the same route and even set fire to them. When the fire brigade arrived, they began to stone it too, so that it had to retreat without extinguishing the fire. When the police arrived, they were likewise stoned.

Now it was the turn of the police. Using their weapons, they swooped down ferociously upon not only the students in the street, but also those in the hostel and classrooms. In the process, hundreds of students were assaulted and badly injured.

Such incidents, regrettably, have been taking place in India for the last forty years. The forms may vary, but the central theme is always the same. Every incident begins with reaction by Muslims to some provocation or the other and inevitably ends in heavy losses in terms of life and property of Muslims. The tally of such incidents, whether on a large or small scale, has reached no less than forty thousand in 40 years. Whenever such an incident takes place, our leaders of every stature, both great and small, have, without exception, blamed the police and the civil authorities. There is no single person worth the name who has cared to admonish the Muslims concerned, or even attempt to bring a greater understanding to them of where the fault actually lies. All such leaders are undoubtedly misguided themselves, and, being so, misguide others. In adopting the stance that they do, they are acting against the *Sunnah*, the path shown by the Prophet Muhammad. Now, according to the Hadith, anything which is against the *Sunnah* is *bid'a* (an innovation) and, as such, leads to deviation, or a going astray. The inevitable result is what Muslims have been undergoing over the past half century.

How is such action against the *Sunnah*? The following *hadith* will explain this:

Hudhaifa, a companion of the Prophet, relates how the latter said: "It does not become a Muslim to humiliate himself." When asked how it is possible to humiliate oneself, the Prophet Muhammad replied, "To expose oneself to a danger over which one has no control."

When we examine the escalation of this recent, tragic incident in the light of this hadith, the very act of complaining about the police, or demonstrating against the majority community appears quite contrary to the way of the Prophet. Every such event is the story, not of Muslims' persecution by others, but of their own un-Islamic behaviour. Given that Muslims are in the minority in this country, and that they are quite aware that the police will return violence for violence – and will give no quarter in the process – and moreover, that there can be no public redress, it surely behoves them to heed the sayings of the Prophet, and sedulously refrain from reacting to the initial provocation. They would do well to remain strictly aloof from any such initiatives as are likely to incur severe retaliatory measures, for this can only culminate in a manner detrimental to themselves and to their cause.

There is another hadith which says: "A believer is not bitten from the one snake-hole twice," or as the English proverb has it, "Once bitten, twice shy." But the Muslims of today seem never to have heard of this old adage. They put their hands into the same hole every day, and every day they are bitten as a result. Even the most contemptible fool would put his hand into a hornets' nest only once, but Muslims do this daily, and daily face the consequences.

This being the state of affairs, can they claim that they regard Islam as their religion be at all tenable, and are we to believe them when they say that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, is their prophet? If we accept the dictionaries' definition of religion and the prophet, their claim is certainly not justified. Muslims must see things as they are, and accept the definitions of the truth which are valid in the eyes of both God and man. Only then will their views and actions be consistent with the social harmony and uplift which is so essential to their very survival.

A fool's paradise

Man is living in a fool's paradise of his own making, but the Resurrection will shatter all his dreams. Then only those who take refuge in His mercy will be saved.

What a shock it will be for man to realize that his activities on earth have amounted to nothing. People take pride in asserting themselves, but they would do better to pride themselves on their humility. They seek to justify their errors, but they would do better to admit them. They have been given tongues with which to praise God, but they praise humans instead. They have been imbued with the emotions of love and fear to offer to God, but they offer them to other objects instead. Hoarding wealth is their greatest aim in life, whereas their greatest aim should be to give their wealth in God's cause. True virtue lies in being kind to the weak, but they ignore the weak and hail the mighty. They would do better to delve into the silent world of meanings, but they prefer to engage in noisy, worthless pursuits. Progress lies in being able to criticize oneself, but they never cease to criticize others.

They were expected to consider worldly wealth as worthless but they have striven after it relentlessly as if it were the source of all goodness.

Today people agonize over the cruelties and injustice perpetrated by others. What will become of them when they are forced to admit to the cruelties and injustice perpetrated by themselves? People have taken shelter in objects other than God, and think that they have gained a firm footing in life.

What will become of them when they find that there is no real refuge save in God? People justify themselves by means of words. What will become of them when they learn that words are empty - that there is no substance to them? By accumulating worldly amenities, they feel sure that they have all they need to succeed in both the worlds. What a shock they will receive when they learn that death has obliterated all in its wake. People unendingly compile lists of others' wrongdoings. What will become of them when they learn that all the mistakes they have made have been observed by the angels of God, and that they will be confronted with the entire list on the day of reckoning? People consider that the problems of this life are the real problems. What will be their state when they learn that the real problem is that of death which leads on to an eternal life far from this ephemeral life? People have set up their own standards about what is right and what is wrong, and when they come up to these self-made standards, they think they are genuinely in the right. How shocked they will be when they learn that only those were in the right who came up to the standard set by God. People think that they are fortunate when they are welcomed by a host of people, but what will happen when they find that only those are fortunate who are to be welcomed by God and his angels?

Man is living in a fool's paradise of his own making, but the Resurrection will shatter all his dreams. Then only those who take refuge in His mercy will be saved.

In the name of God

None other than God is great. This is an obvious truth. But, strange as it may seem, this truth can be turned into an evil. This happens when it has only been half understood. That God, and only God, is great, is an indisputable reality. But the obverse side of the picture—that man is small and insignificant must also be grasped and appreciated. No one is of less significance than man, and it is only when he has learnt both of these truths that he will be imbued with appropriate feelings of humility. If he knows only the first truth, but not the second, it will breed in him an attitude of rebellion. Satan understood God's greatness, but could not grasp his own insignificance. He became, therefore, the continuing root cause of all evil.

In the same way, Hitler too recognized the omnipotence of God, but failed to grasp his own lack of consequence. This resulted in his going down in history as the worst aggressor and evil-doer the world had ever seen.

To utter the words, 'God is great' is to acknowledge an outward reality, and to say, as a corollary, "I am small," indicates one's willingness to mould oneself to this outer reality. Yet there are people who do accept God as a supreme outer reality, without ever actually adapting their lives to this fact. The result of this is that they begin to regard themselves as God. For themselves they become God, and expect others to bow to them. They then enter into conflict with others, although the first prerequisite for acknowledging the greatness of God is to subdue all aggressive instincts completely. They take it upon themselves to abuse their fellow men, whereas whoever genuinely experiences God's omnipresence falls silent in reverence to Him. He who bows to God in fact becomes incapable of making others a target for his invective. Every truth is but a half truth unless and until man discovers the exact way in which it is relevant to him. The search for the eternal truth is at an end only when man comes to realize his true place in relation to it.

Those who accept but one half of the truth without realizing that the other-half must need be accepted will inevitably find themselves guilty of moral inadequacy, whatever their chosen role in life.

Criminal desires

In the nineteenth century, an Italian doctor, Cesare Lombroso, measured the heads of selected groups of people, then asserted on the basis of his findings that the brains of criminals were smaller in dimension than those of non-criminals.

His contention, in fact, was that if certain individuals turned into criminals, it was because they were criminals by birth. Today it has been accepted that nurture, not nature, is responsible for criminal behaviour.

Professors James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein in their book, *Crime and Human Nature*, recently published in America by Simon and Schuster, make the important point that “criminals tend to be now-oriented personalities which make planning or even thinking about the future difficult.”

If we ponder over this psychology of crime we will realize that the Islamic concept is exactly in accordance with reality, while modern civilization's view of it is exactly the opposite.

Islam orients the mind towards the after-life, whereas the modern trend is to turn it towards the here and now. This is how Islamic thought helps to root out criminal desires, whereas the materialism of modern culture nurtures criminal propensities.

A giver group

The Muslim image in the world today is that of the taker, not of the giver. And that being so, the man behind the image is utterly without value. It is his sense of loss which motivates him, and not his sense of gain.

In any period of great religious or intellectual transformation, there are always two distinct kinds of movements. One is launched, positively, on the basis of some discovery which is held to be of great benefit to mankind, whereas the other is a negative process, set in motion out of a sense of deprivation, or in order to recover something which has been lost. The Islamic movement, for its part, was certainly launched with a prior sense of having found something of inestimable value, but we have to ask ourselves in this day and age whether, as a movement, it has been gaining or losing in momentum.

The wonderful sense of discovery with which the companions of the Prophet were imbued was that of having become aware of the oneness of God, in contradistinction to polytheism. The realization had come to them that the life hereafter – man's entry into paradise – was the only goal worthy of man's endeavours. They learned too that a life devoid of principle was one of utter degradation and that the highest human objective should be to become a man of principle. They had been stirred to the very core of their beings by this thought. Their very souls had been moved by it, their minds enlightened, and new doors to reality opened before them. Their lives were so truly transformed by this idea, that it was a kind of re-birth for them. Although whatever they had gained in the process was apparently non-material – a thing of the mind – it was so great a thing for them that it took precedence over all else. This discovery gave them the strength to remain content, even when bereft of all their worldly possessions. No sacrifice was then too great for them to make.

Another benefit of their discovery was that it conferred upon them the position of *da'is*, conveyors of the divine message to the entire world. Let me stress that it is important at this point to understand the essential difference between a *da'i* and a national leader. The latter is one who, at the apex of the ruling party, expects to be able to command others and to make demands upon them, whereas the *da'i* is always the giver. He never takes anything from others. His role is always positive, beneficent.

What the Companions of the Prophet had was greater than anything else in this world. What they had discovered was a guarantee that they might stand before the world as givers, not takers. It was this characteristic which endowed them with such irresistible power, and it was not long before the greater part of the inhabited world came under their sway, for their moral superiority was undeniable.

But this, regrettably, cannot be said of present-day Muslims, who parrot the names of the Prophet's companions without their religion being in any sense a great discovery for them. Hence this desire of theirs to appear before the world in the garb of national leaders, and not as da'is. The Muslim image in the world today is that of the taker, not of the giver. And that being so, the man behind the image is utterly without value. It is his sense of loss which motivates him, and not his sense of gain. Propelled by such people, the Islamic movement is doomed to lose in momentum, and it will not be long before it comes to a complete standstill unless we take measures to re-energize it. We must surely undertake individual and mass reforms, returning to the basic tenets of Islam, if we are not to be swamped by total moral inertia.

Prophets of old

'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas tells of how the Prophet, on reaching Medina after his emigration from Mecca, found the Jews fasting on the day of Ashura – the tenth day of the month of Muharram. He asked them what the special significance of that day was that they should make it a day of fasting. "This is a day of the greatest importance," they replied. "It was on this day that God rescued Moses and his people, at the same time drowning their enemies. Moses, in thanksgiving, fasted on this day, and we follow his example.'" "We are more worthy, and we are closer to Moses than you," the Prophet replied, and he thereupon declared that day a day of fasting, exhorting his followers to do likewise.

It is clear from this incident that the practices of the ancient prophets are to be followed by Muslims, as was done in pre-Islamic times. Bearing this in mind, we should give our attention to another aspect of Moses' mission which sets an important example for the Muslims of today.

When Moses began his mission to Egypt, he came into contact with two separate groups of people – the Pharaoh's clan, known as Qabtaeans, and the Children of Israel. The latter were the Muslims of their day, but, like the Qabtaeans, had strayed far away from divine guidance. The Qabtaeans' transgression took the form of idolatry and paganism and while the Children of Israel professed true religion, their religious practices were, in fact, a crude distortion of the teachings of their Prophets. Moses, born amongst the Children of Israel, was charged with the task of reforming his peoples. He did not, however, wait until his own people had mended their ways before he conveyed the message of God to Pharaoh. He carried out both tasks simultaneously, addressing himself both to the Qabtaeans and to the Children of Israel.

The example of Moses clearly shows what a Muslim's course of action ought to be. That is, even where Muslims themselves are in need of reform, the task of communicating the message of Islam to non-Muslims should not be delayed until Muslim reform has been accomplished.

When one is broken in two

When an inanimate object, such as a piece of wood, is broken in two, it remains broken. Never again can it remould itself into one piece. Animate objects, however, live on even after breakages. When one live amoeba is cut in two, it turns into two live amoebae.

This is surely a sign from God, showing us the depth of opportunity that God has kept in store for us live human beings in this world. For a human being, no defeat is final, no disaster permanently crippling. As an animate being, no human can be finally shattered for, when broken, its every piece is welded again into a new, live being, if anything, more formidable than before.

For a human being, failure is not failure at all, for it only serves to make one into a more profound, thoughtful person. Obstacles present no hindrance, for they open up new avenues of intellectual advance. Setbacks do not stunt one's growth, for even if one is crushed into many small pieces, each piece in its own right has the capacity to form the building blocks of an entirely new being.

Such are the never-ending possibilities which God has created for man in this world, but it is only he who is alive to these possibilities who can benefit from them, gathering and marshalling his resources after some shattering setback. When he tastes defeat, he does not lose heart, but prepares himself to issue a new challenge. He rebuilds anew his shipwrecked boat, and, abroad it, restarts his journey through life.

How strange that life should end like that

Nandini, daughter of Govind Narain, former governor of Karnataka, was just 38 years old when she passed away in New Delhi on September 16, 1981. Thus a young, vibrant life came to a sudden halt; a cheerful face was removed from the scene of life.

Nandini was an intelligent and healthy person. After receiving higher education in India, she acquired a degree in journalism from America, then became a senior reporter with *The Hindustan Times*. Her versatile and dashing talent made her a popular figure with her colleagues. As one of them put it: 'She loved life to the full and wanted to live it to the full.'

Several of her colleagues contributed to a commemorative article published in *The Hindustan Times* September 17, 1981. They conclude their article with these words: "It is a cruel reminder of the fact that there is a deadline for everyone.

How strange it is that the flame of life should suddenly be extinguished, a laughing face suddenly grow still to be buried beneath the earth: how strange that a spirit full of hope and aspirations should be removed from the scene of life, leaving all its hopes and aspirations behind in the world.

How meaningful life appears to be and how meaningless it is rendered by its conclusion. How free man appears to be, but how helpless he is before death. How dear he holds his desires and ambitions, only for fate to ruthlessly stamp them out.

Remembrance of death alone should be enough to cure man's rebellious nature. Peace and harmony on earth can only come from man learning his limitations, and resigning himself to them. There is no better way of learning this lesson than by remembering death.

Human nature

Mount Everest, at 29,028 feet above sea level, is the highest peak in the world. Over a period of 30 years about 10 expeditions had set out to scale it but had failed. Finally, on May 29, 1953, two men succeeded in reaching the summit – Sir Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norgay.

Tenzing Norgay started out in life as a mountain coolie from Nepal. After this event, he shot to extraordinary fame, and began to receive invitation from all over the world. He also had the opportunity to meet the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other world personalities, and was later appointed Director of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. His biography, published under the title of *Man of Everest*, was written in English – although Tenzing knew little English – by a western writer, James Ramsey Ullman. (*Indian Express*, New Delhi, 10 May, 1986).

Tenzing died on May 9, 1986; and Sir Edmund Hilary, who had, incidentally, become the High Commissioner for New Zealand in India, issued an obituary which paid fitting tribute to him. It said, in this obituary, that when Tenzing succeeded in reaching the top of Everest, 'at the high point of his life, he knelt in the snow, made a little hole and put sweets into it – his gesture to the gods.'

Every man has a strong natural urge to attribute his successes to some superior being, but when he has been left in a state of un-awareness that there is only one true God, he makes his obeisance to gods of his own invention.

The key to social harmony

All men are from Adam and Adam was from earth. – Hadith

Although we are all equal in the eyes of God when it comes to justice, mercy and obedience to the Divine Will, it becomes distressingly clear as we progress through life, that many individuals are less well-equipped than others to succeed in any material or spiritual sense. Philosophers, medical men, sociologists, educationists are still arguing as to the roles of heredity and environment in producing this inequitable state of affairs, and, as yet, are far from producing a solution to the problem. There is no wishing it away, and much as governments and philanthropists have striven to redress this imbalance, we have only to look around us to see with what seeming permanence this situation is stamped. Many countries have attempted to provide equal opportunities for all; but even where material assistance is the greatest, there is always a small group of individuals who stand head and shoulders above the others; there is always, beneath them, a large body of quite average performers, and sometimes an equally large, or even larger group at the foot of the ladder who make very little of their lives, many of them being what modern educationists would call 'under-achievers'. That is, they do have a certain potential, but they do not make serious efforts to live up to it.

This is a situation which capitalism has always exploited, in the process, exaggerating the differences between the different classes of people. Socialism, on the other hand, has tried to eliminate such differences, in the interest of both the state and the individual. But whatever the political objectives, individual psychology has remained fundamentally the same. There is still the same friction caused by one individual doing better than another, the same resentment at success being the lot of one's neighbour and not of one's own self, the same reluctance to give honour where honour is due. Sometimes this takes the extreme form of character assassination of genuinely superior individuals.

This is when we must stop short of such baseness. This is when we must discount the effects of whatever political and educational systems we live under. This is when we must discard hardened attitudes of envy, bitterness, spite, and, returning to a pure mental state from which all acrimony has been banished, look upon ourselves and our fellow-men as being equal in the eyes of God. It is this aspect of human existence upon which we must keep our attention firmly focussed, irrespective of its material trappings. It is then and then only that we shall live in true social harmony.

Knowledge that helps

The Prophet Muhammad said: "The learned are the heirs of the prophets." On another occasion, the Prophet prayed "Lord, have mercy on my successors." The Prophet was asked who his successors were, and he answered: "Those who preserve my teachings and pass them on to mankind." As Abu al-Aswad said: "Knowledge is the greatest of powers. Kings rule over people, but the learned rule over kings." Abu ibn Abd Allah said to 'Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the 8th Umayyad Caliph: "People say: 'Become learned if you can; if you cannot, at least seek learning; and if you cannot even seek learning, love those who do; and if you cannot love them, at least do not hate them.'" "Glory be to God," said 'Umar. "For him too God has made a means of salvation."

Jurists have divided the areas covered by the commandments of Islam into several categories: obligatory, supererogatory, unlawful, reprehensible, and so on. Allama Shatibi writes that, as far as self-purification and becoming close to God are concerned, these categories have no importance; and the real aim of religion is self-purification. Whatever helps one achieve that end is desirable whether it is counted as obligatory or supererogatory, and whatever pulls one in the direction of evil is undesirable, whether it is called reprehensible or unlawful.

As Hasan Basri, a noted 8th century religious scholar, put it: "The greatest knowledge is that which comes from abstinence and meditation."

Road block

When a road is under repair, a notice bearing the words 'Road Closed' is put up to warn unwary travellers. But this does not mean that the path to one's destination is irrevocably barred. There are always other highways and by-ways – it is just a question of looking around for them. Sometimes one can reach one's destination just as well by zigzagging through narrow lanes and alleyways. The only difference is that this takes somewhat longer, and one has to keep one's wits about one to negotiate narrower roadways and sharper turnings. But arrive one finally does.

Life's journey is very often like this. One would like to proceed by broad straight routes, moving fast and reaching one's goal in the most direct possible way. But, so often such roads are blocked, and achieving success begins to seem a very difficult matter. But for every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads which are open. It is just a question of having to go about things in a roundabout way. This is particularly true if you meet with an adversary and feel that you are unable to confront him head-on. It is then that you must find some indirect means of dealing with him. Often compromise of adjustment is the best solution.

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can certainly search for and find opportunities in some other field. When you fail to find a place for yourself in the front row, you can always make do with one in the rear until a place up ahead finally falls vacant for you. When you cannot find people to extend a helping hand to you, go on fearlessly and strike out on your own. When you need things from people to help you on in life and no one seems ready to be generous, stop thinking of how deprived you are and try instead to earn God's blessings.

For every closed door, there is always another which is open – but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it.

Moon mission

In this world of competition it is necessary to enter the field fully prepared. If you enter it inadequately prepared, little else but failure will await you.

American Astronaut, Neil Armstrong, stepped on to the moon for the first time in July, 1969. The moment he set his foot on the moon, the control mission in America received these words uttered by him:

“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Armstrong and his two colleagues were selected from amongst the top 30 astronauts of the U.S. He possessed to a very high degree all those qualities which were necessary for this difficult, historic mission – extraordinary skill in flying, intelligence, strength, ability to absorb information, mental and emotional balance and the courage to accept challenges unhesitatingly. Once selected, he had to undergo rigorous training, for instance, having to remain in deep water for long periods so that he would become used to weightlessness. So that he could deal with every possible emergency, he did elaborate course in astronomy, space flight, rocket flight, the physics of the moon, etc., – all with the help of computerized space data.

The 3100 ton Apollo 11 seemed a giant. It was as high as a 36-storey building, having 8 million parts and 91 engines installed in it. On the top was the comparatively small machine, the Columbia, on which the astronauts were seated to set off on their historic journey.

The space machine was duly blasted off, circling the earth for two’ and a half hours. Then its speed increased to 403 miles per minute and on reaching an altitude of 3000 miles the Columbia separated from the rest of the machines. It was so equipped that the seating space for the astronauts was only as much as in an ordinary taxi. Finally they alighted on the moon from where they gathered 46 pounds of moon earth, leaving equipment worth 5 lakh pounds behind them. They also left their foot prints on its surface which, hopefully will remain intact for half a million years.

It was only after such highly elaborate preparations that the “small step” could be taken which was going to result in such a “giant leap” for mankind.

Everyone has something to give

The Prophet said. "For every limb of man's body, for every new day, there is an act of charity to be performed. To judge fairly between two people is an act of charity. To give someone a hand climbing on his mount, or taking luggage off it, is an act of charity. A good word is an act of charity. To remove any obstacle from a path is an act of charity." (*Bukhari and Muslim*)